

## Rail Office sharpens focus

**T**he numbers speak for themselves. Rail transportation in Iowa serves 90 of our 99 counties; and, although rail miles represents only 3 percent of Iowa's 130,000-mile freight system, rail cars carry 37 percent of Iowa's freight.

These facts may be new to some Iowans, but planning and promoting rail transportation has been a function of the DOT since 1978 when the first statewide rail plan was completed. At that time the DOT's main concern was analyzing Iowa's branchline network. Updated plans in subsequent years provided current information about Iowa's rail infrastructure and service, and reviewed rail issues, state rail policy and program accomplishments.

During the DOT's reorganization in 2000 that created the Modal Division, the Office of Rail Transportation came back into existence. This new office has refined its focus to a few key areas:

- improving safety and rideability of railroad/highway crossings;
- administering programs to assist railroads in upgrading their rail infrastructure;
- monitoring the physical condition of Iowa's rail trackage through the track inspection program;
- providing current rail information to users and citizens;
- researching alternate funding sources for rail improvements;
- fostering the development of rail passenger service in the state; and
- monitoring trends that may impact Iowa rail service.

While Iowa railroads compete with other transportation modes, they also cooperate with those modes to provide intermodal service to the state. Almost everyday trains carrying semitrailers can be seen on rails across the state. This transfer of freight from truck to train and vice versa has become routine in recent years, and provides businesses a cost-effective means to get goods from one place to another.

When hauling commodities such as grain, rail is the answer for 54 percent of the elevators in Iowa. One rail car can carry as much as four semitrailers. It would require 400 semis stretching 5.3 miles bumper-to-bumper to move the same amount of grain moved by a 100-car grain train. In 2000, a total of 152,479 rail car loads of grain originated in Iowa. To move that same amount by truck would have taken more than 600,000 semis, or an additional 1,650 trucks per day on our highways.

Although grain is the major



commodity originated in Iowa and transported by rail, food products, chemicals and fertilizer, coal and farm products are also carried on trains crisscrossing the state. This efficient method of shipping conserves thousands of gallons of fuel every year, and the fuel efficiency of trains is increasing.

Since 1985 Iowa railroad fuel efficiency has increased 35 percent. If just one additional trainload of freight were diverted from truck to rail over a distance of 500 miles, 70,000 gallons of fuel would be conserved.

This efficiency benefits us in lessening our dependence on foreign oil and also pays an environmental dividend in cleaner air.

As the numbers show, rail transportation in Iowa is vital to our state's economic stability. In the next INSIDE, we'll examine the changes in rail transportation and how those changes continue to improve this cost-effective freight movement alternative.

### *Tribute*

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Brad Kuta was struck by a careless driver Aug. 8, 1995, while working on a survey crew on U.S. 75 one mile south of Merrill in northwest Iowa.

To find out more about the memorial, you can visit the ATSSA Web site at [www.atssa.com](http://www.atssa.com) and click on the "Public Information" link.

If you know of someone killed in a work zone crash and would like to submit that name for inclusion on the memorial, there is a form to complete on this Web site.